

Taira: An Okinawan Village 497 775

ple did not carry it through the streets but along the shore to a spot nearby where the car could pull up. 784

Communication with ancestral or family spirits lies in the hands of individual households or the larger kin group. In general, as with the nature deities, women maintain the relationship. The oldest woman in the house prays and makes offerings in front of the divine shelf or by the tombs. Sometimes the high priestess, whose only regular role in the cult of ancestors centers around the mythical founder of the village to whom vague references are made, is asked to conduct a special prayer for a family at its ancestral shrine. Such invitations are usually the result of consultation with another religious practitioner to whom one turns in case of misfortune.* 766 782 794 769 562 793 756

Those who are considering a special undertaking, such as building a new house or moving to another one, or transporting ancestral tablets from one home shrine to another, seek the advice of a diviner, the *sanjinsō* or *yekisha*. This expert, always a man, consults books on the workings of the universe, special astrological calendars from which he can predict events by using a horoscope calculated on the birth date of the person seeking advice. 791 342

Although it would seem from the attendance at ceremonies that older people, mostly women, are the supporters of religion, even the most modern of the Tairans seem to share beliefs in the power of the supernatural forces and are loath to make an open break with traditions. One may verbalize that the old religion is just "superstition," but when it comes to dealing with adverse events, when somebody suggests that perhaps the *yuta* should be consulted, or a special offering is in order, or when the old special wine of the gods is prepared from rice for Boat Race Day, then many of the apparent apostates cooperate. To some extent this is done to appease the older people, but fear of neglecting duties, especially toward ancestors, is probably much stronger in general than people's behavior would suggest. Religious influence, then, which controlled so many facets of village life in former days, still acts as a strong force in uniting the members of families and descent groups as well as in binding together the community as a unit separate from other communities. 771 182 621

* See Chapter 9 for description of the *yuta* or shaman.

757 frequently and may be repeated as many as four times during the
854 first year of a child's life. An older child occasionally undergoes this
164 treatment for a case of violent impetigo. Even a horse may be bled in
232 this way for loss of appetite or other symptoms of disease.

578 A woman whose face had been struck in an unusual display of temper
underwent a blood letting soon after a swelling appeared. Her neighbor
from across the street, a farmer like everyone else, sterilized her
cheek with iodine and then cut it with a razor until the blood flowed
freely. After a night's rest, the woman appeared outside her house
without any signs of swelling and seemingly recovered.

753 As was pointed out previously, many diseases are believed to be
776 caused by supernatural forces: the ancestor spirits, spirits of those who
769 have just died, and natural deities and evil spirits who wander around
775 at night. The ancestors expect proper respect and attention and in general
764 are benevolent unless neglected. Spirits of those who have recently
died are most dangerous if the deceased is from another village. For deceased
villagers one is careful to purify oneself after the funeral. The
doors of each house are shut at night to protect against the evil spirits
of the night air. Disease is less frequently caused by natural deities who
have been neglected or mistreated.

755 In case of sickness or other unfortunate events in the family, somebody
756 may go to consult the *yuta*, a shaman who communicates with
787 the supernatural. She discovers the cause of misfortune with the help
of rice oracles and through powers of divination received through
visions and hallucinations. There is no *yuta* living in Taira now, so
that people have to travel to the other side of the island, an hour or
more on foot, if they want to learn about the source of some evil. Taira

769 people make many such trips to consult this shamanistic specialist. The
most common cause of misfortune discovered by the *yuta* is neglect of
ceremonies to the ancestral gods or, less frequently, the neglect of ceremonies
to the natural deities. Although the *yuta* stands in no direct
793 connection with the high priestess, she may suggest that her client ask
the priestess for special prayers to rectify the negligence. In such cases,
then, the competence of individuals in the family may not be adequate
to deal with the ancestral world, and the priestess enters into family
religion.

597 Some Taira parents still find an adoptive parent for a sickly child in
755 the belief that his own ancestors have caused bad health, and that this
769 can only be remedied by making a formal arrangement which transfers
796 ancestral responsibility for the child to another family. The child remains
with his own parents and only visits his foster parents during
the New Year and the midsummer Buddhist *Bon* Festival, which honors
ancestors, and perhaps at one or two other occasions during the
year.

191 (mentioned previously), song, and the indigenous religion. Okinawan song and
 178 music undoubtedly exceed both Japanese and Western in popularity; in fact, no
 191 other facet of Okinawan culture has so successfully withstood the changes of
 178 the past seventy-five years. Songs such as the *Kagiyadefu* (which some Okina-
 533 wans liken to a national anthem), *Nubui Kuduchi*, *Hamachidori*, *Tanchame* are
 known and loved by all. Some of the phonograph record stores in Naha carry
 as many as several hundred different recordings of Okinawan songs, and vir-
 194 tually all of these are recorded in Okinawan. All priestesses of the indigen-
 178 ous religion interviewed by the author stated that Okinawan was the language
 174 of prayer and ceremony; to some this was a burden, as in the case of one
 priestess who had spent most of her life in Japan. A few admitted that the
 language of the ceremonies and particularly that of the old songs or *umui*
 (sometime rendered *okoro*) was rather obscure and not fully understood; these
 are transmitted orally from the older priestess to her successor and undoubtedly
 191 contain many archaic words. Outside the formal religious structure yet inex-
 178 tricably linked to it are shamans (*yuta*) and fortune tellers ('*ekisha*'). The
 756 former, most often a woman, uses Okinawan almost exclusively in rites concerned
 174 with divining, exorcism, and curing. The latter, nearly always a male, is
 usually a fairly well-educated person, as the profession is based on interpre-
 tations of certain books used in conjunction with the ancient Chinese *Book of*
Changes (*I Ching*), and either Japanese or Okinawan, depending on the customer,
 may be used in giving the reading. Both practitioners are extremely popular,
 but the fortune teller is usually found in the cities and towns whereas the
 shaman may be found in Naha or the smallest hamlet.

195 Japanese With the abdication of Shō Tai in 1879 the Japanese government ini-
 191 tiated a program designed for integrating Okinawa into the national
 177 state as rapidly as possible. An effort was made to stamp out all vestiges of
 643 Okinawan culture, utilizing techniques ranging from education and indoctrina-
 tion to repressive laws and police measures. Greatest emphasis was given to
 making Japanese speakers out of Okinawans. Leavenworth quotes Governor Nara-
 hara as stating that the creation of Japanese speakers was of more value than
 175 all the repressive laws prohibiting certain customs.¹ At the start the Japanese
 191 were hindered by a lack of schools and teachers, and so the program moved ahead
 177 slowly. An effective national school system covering the rural areas where the
 871 bulk of the population was located and taking in both sexes was not fully opera-
 tive until about the time of World War I. The failure of Japanese to displace
 Okinawan can be attributed largely to a lack of time and a lack of facilities
 for education beyond the elementary level. By the time of World War II but two
 generations were schooled in Japanese, and the majority of these had received
 no more than six years of education.

191 Though Japanese failed to displace Okinawan, it did succeed in becom-
 177 ing a necessity in the lives of most people and in establishing itself as the
 551 prestige language. With the government, press, schools, cinema, radio, and
 high-level commerce utilizing Japanese exclusively, participation in modern
 life without a knowledge of Japanese became impossible. The incentives towards
 competence in Japanese were many, whereas there appeared to be little gained

¹ Leavenworth, 1905, p. 37.

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[857] Adult Responsibility For women responsibilities come early. Mothers give their daughters tasks while their sons play. At marriage a woman enters her husband's household and immediately assumes adult burdens that she may not put down until old age. As a grandmother she may still care for grandchildren while her husband has left most of his responsibilities to his sons. [887] She may acquire ritual responsibilities toward her husband's family which can only increase with time.

[857] For a man responsibilities come gradually. Childhood is a time for play---except for the future scholar, or in cases of extreme poverty. Youth is a time when responsibilities may be postponed---except where an oldest son has been orphaned. Even after marriage a young man, though he may have to work hard, is not expected to remain sober and stay home nights. The peak of a man's responsibility comes with full maturity, when he has sons himself and when his father is beginning to age. This peak may rise to greater heights than that of his wife and his labor may be harder and make greater demands on his strength and health. But again in old age he may put his burden down and he is expected to seek those pleasures that he can still enjoy.

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Women's lives may be duller but they are generally longer. And in old age a woman has the compensation of greater freedom than she has ever had before. Old women often speak with a frankness that is embarrassing to young people of either sex. Old women are also the repositories of knowledge of the ancestors and of the supernatural and thus become greatly respected and influential. Both the religious functionaries (kaninshu) of the kinship group and the seeresses or mediums (yute) consulted on numerous occasions are usually women. [799] An old man, unless he is a scholar or a diviner (sanjinsoo) has less chance of attaining fame. [852]

But old men, as well as old women, may become tyrants. One Yamada family consisted of an old couple and their three grandchildren, the oldest a boy of twenty. This boy was registered as the head of the family, while the old man, according to the register, had retired; but when the boy had the opportunity to make a little money, which he needed for clothes, the old man took it for tobacco. On the other hand he permitted the youths of the neighborhood to hold parties in his house---hoping, one suspects, to help consume the refreshments---something a middle-aged parent might not have tolerated.

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Formal Recognition of Old Age A man may officially retire, that is, he may transfer house headship in the register to a son or grandson, but as I have just indicated this may not prevent him from actually holding the family purse strings. For the community formal recognition of old age comes with the celebration of "year days" (tushibii). These are held on the anniversaries of the "birth year" of an old person. A person's birth year is the year, in the cycle of twelve, in which he was born. Since the reckoning of age is a matter of counting the years during which one has lived, the year of birth counts as one and so when the cycle of twelve has passed once and the year is again the birth year, a person's years are thirteen. Each time a person's birth year recurs it marks a significant point in his life. These recurrences are celebrated not on the anniversary of the day of birth but on the first day of the cycle that corresponds to the year, after Lunar New Year's. Thus 1954 was

the Year of the Horse, and so all persons born during any year of the Horse--- 888
 1942, 1930, etc.---celebrated their "year day" on the first Day of the Horse 527
 of the new year. Although theoretically all year days are important, in
 practice only those of old age are given much attention. These are the cele-
 brations of the 61st, 73rd, 85th, and 97th years. The 88th and 90th may also
 be celebrated. The celebration of the year day of an old person is a matter
 of pride for the whole family; formal invitations are sent, and the guests
 are served food and drink requiring considerable expense on the part of the
 family.

Death After his death a person does not cease to be of any importance to 769
 the family. On the contrary he takes on a new importance as a focal
 point for ceremonies and perhaps for feelings of anxiety.

Death is attributed to both natural and supernatural causes¹ with 761
 natural causes probably barely in the majority. But there is also the vague
 notion that one's life span is predetermined.

Almost immediately after the death of a person, members of his family 756 •
 usually consult a yuta to learn if there was any last request or information 763
 that the deceased had wished to impart to his family. This might consist of
 an explanation of his death, a confession of some early misdeed, or last in-
 structions to his heirs. While I was working at Yamada an informant, an
 energetic, thoroughly likeable old lady, died suddenly. I learned later that
 her family immediately went to Yakana, some twelve miles away, a place famous
 for its many yuta. There they consulted a yuta and asked if there had been
 any message the old woman wanted to communicate. They were told that the old
 woman had been destined to die a year before but because she was such a good
 woman she had lived an extra year, during which she had accomplished every-
 thing she had intended to do---there was nothing to reveal. The family was
 relieved and comforted.

The Funeral Women may cry out immediately upon learning that a mem- 764
 ber of the family has died. The body is laid in the second room of the house
 and flexed so that it may be more easily put into the coffin. If the death
 occurs in the morning the funeral may be held the afternoon of that day; if
 later in the day, the next afternoon. Offerings are placed before the body
 and when the funeral is not until the next day, relatives keep a wake over it.

The funeral itself consists of a ceremony at the home of the deceased,
 a procession to the tomb, and the placing of the coffin in the tomb. These
 steps may be more or less elaborate depending upon the means of the family.
 However, the local unit, the 'han' or the chinju, takes responsibility for
 some activities, making for uniformity. Member of the 'han' or chinju make
 two paper tablets with the name of the deceased written on them and make a
 large square wooden box for a coffin. On the afternoon of the funeral, the
 body is put into the coffin and a tray containing one of the paper tablets,
 offerings of fruit, and an incense burner is placed before it. If the de-
 ceased has requested it, a Buddhist priest may be called from one of the lar-
 ger towns, but many country people do not call a priest, and indeed may never [793]

¹ See Chapter IX.

778 'kami' is like the Oceanian "mana", a supernatural power that enters natural
 171 objects or persons.¹ Whatever may be the case in Japan, the Okinawan kami
 refers to definite beings, discrete entities, and not to a force. However,
 the concepts shiji and perhaps shii may be mana-like.

753 Causes of Disease Okinawans frequently use these concepts of the supernatural
 in their interpretation of the causes and proper treatment
 of illnesses of the body. Illness may be caused, they believe, by loss of
 the shii or the mabui, by the harmful inclinations of other living persons
 and of dead persons, and by offences to ancestors and other spirits that are
 ordinarily helpful.

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Gradual withdrawal of the shii may cause illness or death. A preg-
 nant woman is warned not to attend a funeral or a bone-washing because the
shii of the unborn child may be drawn into the tomb. A sudden jolt or a
 scare may cause the mabui to be dislodged and this will result in a feeling
 of weakness and, if the mabui is not replaced, perhaps ultimately death.
 Treatment of loss of mabui is often practiced by old women. One woman who
 had treated her grandchildren on numerous occasions said that she laid on a
 table offerings including salt, rice, water, and a dish containing seven
 stones; then she took a garment of the sick child, prayed at the entrance
 to the house, and called the child's name. The mabui of the child then
 entered the garment and when she put the garment on the child the mabui re-
 entered the child. Formerly she would have prayed at the pigsty-privy, but
 it no longer exists. One of her sons gave the interpretation that the
 [776] pigsty-privy god being the lowest god knew the whereabouts of the lost mabui
 and he informed the ancestral spirits who were able to bring it back to the
 garment.

[775] The most serious cases of loss of mabui are caused by the actual
 theft of the mabui by dead persons, who are said to take the mabui to the
 tomb. As I have already mentioned, this may happen when a baby sneezes.

[754] Treatment of this type of soul-loss probably requires the services of a
yuta, a sort of shaman. The yuta is said to be able to see the living per-
 son's mabui before the tomb, in the form of the person. If the form is
 facing this world and looks sad there is a chance of recovery, but if it
 is facing the tomb and looks happy, the patient will probably die. But in
 spite of the occasional serious nature of loss of mabui, I have observed
 young boys when startled jokingly cry out "mabuyaa, mabuyaa!" as if to call
 back their displaced mabui. And it is said that some persons jokingly pre-
 tend to scoop it up and pour it back into the body through the head. How-
 ever, the joke may serve to relieve actual tensions that exist after a sud-
 den shock.

754 Little information was obtained on the harm that can be done by a
 living person with ichijama. According to Yanagida¹ the ichijama is the
 soul of a woman who can send it to possess a person or object in order to

¹ Haring, 1946, p. 221 and elsewhere.

² Yanagida, 1951, p. 30.

cause misfortune; the ability to do this, he says, is hereditary from mother to daughter. My informants did not identify ichijama with the mabui or any other such entity, but merely explained it as a kind of "horoi", "curse". Its effect is a sharp pain inside the body or the feeling that a finger nail has been thrust into the eye. If the person responsible is known, they said, the affliction may be cured by spitting in his direction and throwing pig dung in his direction, shouting, "I smear it on your face!" According to Yanagida, a yuta can cure an afflicted person by squeezing his thumb, which causes the thumb of the person responsible to be crushed. [754] [756]

Illness may also be caused by gods or local spirits as punishment for the breaking of tabus. For example, at Yamazato in Chinen-son it was said that on the 1st, 8th, 18th, and 28th of every month the "mountain god" (yama nu kami) makes a circuit of inspection of the mountain behind the village and therefore one cannot go to cut trees or grass on those days for fear of punishment. 753 784

But probably the most frequent interpretation of illness and misfortune is that it is caused by ugwambusuku, an insufficiency of worship (from ugwang, "worship" and fusuku, "insufficiency"). As has been explained, the dead can influence the lives of the living for good or bad. If the ancestors of a family are well cared for, that is, receive the proper offerings and worship, they may help that family to prosper and multiply, but on the other hand, if the ancestors are not cared for they will let the family know of their needs by some light illness, or, if their needs are still ignored, by some greater misfortune. They may not deliberately mean to harm their descendants; the misfortune may be automatic; this point is not clear. At any rate, the fear of ugwambusuku appears to be a very common anxiety and to play a central role in the whole structure of ancestor worship. Various religious practitioners and diviners, but particularly the yuta, are frequently called upon to try to determine where the insufficiency lies, what deceased person has not received his full share of worship and is therefore causing the current illness or other misfortune. To account for such illnesses and misfortunes the yuta and others may have revelations (shirashi) which revise the family's genealogy and even reveal the existence of hitherto unknown ancestors. [752] [756] [782]

The insufficiency is not always of worship of the ancestors, although this is probably the most frequent type. Illness may also be caused by an insufficiency of worship of the Fire God. It is said that if an illegitimate child or the child of a secondary wife does not worship at least once at the Fire God of his shiji ("line") that is, the Fire God of his father's family, he may become ill. Thus it is not uncommon for the mother of an illegitimate child to bring it to the house of its father and ask to let it pray once to the Fire God there. This practice may also, of course, serve to demonstrate paternity. 753 782 [348] [851]

Also probably related to the concept that the ancestors influence the living is the practice of establishing a fictitious adoptive relationship between a child and an unrelated family. If a child is weakly its mother may ask an unrelated adult to become the yashinee-uya, "adopted parent", 768 753

769 of the child; the child prays several times a year, on the important occasions, at the ancestral tablets of the adopted parent, but otherwise lives as before. The rationale of this practice may be: if one set of ancestors is not sufficient for the child, why not give him another?

753 Also related to the concept ugvambusuku is the notion that certain persons are destined to do more than just make offerings; some are to become kaminchu, "god persons", and play the principal roles at the family worship at the important holidays. If these persons shirk this duty they may become ill as a consequence. In certain persons, particularly older women, persistent illness and especially mental illness may be interpreted as a sure sign that the afflicted person ought to become a kaminchu. There is one well-recognized type of mental illness called 'kami-buri'; the person with this disorder constantly makes the gestures of prayer toward various persons and objects in an extravagant manner. Such a person is almost sure to become a religious practitioner after recovery. In fact some kaminchu positions must be filled by persons who have had 'kami-buri'. The yuta may also receive his, or more often her, vocation through such an illness. (Recently a visiting psychiatrist commented on the low number of cases at the Kin mental hospital. There are of course many cases that are not committed to the institution because Okinawan society has a place for them; they become its psychiatrists.)

Other concepts of disease will be discussed in the next section.

4. Medical Practice

755 Home Remedies There are a number of home remedies that are known to many persons, especially older women. These include the use of certain herbs, the letting of blood, the use of salt, prayer, swearing for exorcism, spells. These methods of treatment may be used by any old woman to the extent of her knowledge, but if the illness appears to be too serious for these treatments a professional medical practitioner may be consulted. However, the distinction between the professional person and the skilled amateur is not always clear.

757 Herbs are used for digestive disorders and particularly for female disorders. Tawada in his description of Okinawan flora¹ lists ten plants used for medicinal purposes, nine of which are said to be useful to female disorders along with a variety of other things ranging from toothaches to appendicitis.

757 Blood-letting is practiced on most infants as a cure for skin eruptions and is sometimes also used on adults. Shallow incisions are made with a razor to let out the "bad blood". These are made on a baby's buttocks and sometimes, though less frequently at the present time than in the past, on the face of an adult.

755 Salt is used for purification. A yuta whom I saw exorcise a house and yard took salt into his mouth and then spit it and threw it in the

¹ Tawada, 1951.

- 756 The Yuta The yuta has been mentioned several times already as a dealer in the supernatural, a sort of shaman. She is usually a woman, though not always so, and usually an older person. In the minds of some [794] she is confused with the kaminchu ("god person"), but the two are probably quite distinct. A kaminchu is a person, also usually a woman, who officiates at the family worship or assists the nuru in village worship on the important holidays. The yuta on the other hand is a person whose services may be sought on any occasion for individual problems. Her methods are divination, prayer, and possession. She may be called upon to determine the cause of an illness. She may do so by divining with grains of rice. She asks a question and then takes a pinch of grains and separates them out into pairs. If there is none left over the question is answered in the affirmative; if there is one left over it is in the negative. Or she may pray and then wait for the inspiration of some supernatural being. If the cause of the illness is determined to be an uwamabusuku, as it often is, then she may reveal what ancestor or god it is who has not received sufficient worship. If she is consulted after the death of a relative to learn if there was any last wish to communicate, she may function as a medium, letting the dead person speak with her mouth. She may be consulted merely to learn about the character and future of an individual. In this case and perhaps in most she asks for the saa (the birth year) of the person in question, but uses no other astrological data.

- 791 The Sanjinsoo The most respected type of diviner is the person called sanjinsoo (possibly from his sign board, which resembles the character 'three' written three times) or suumuchi ("book person") in Okinawan or 'ekisha' in Japanese. This person is always a man, usually dignified and scholarly in appearance. He regards himself as a scholar, perhaps even as a scientist; he is a student of 'ekigaku', the "study of changes", a theory of the workings of the universe that goes back to the I Ching, the Book of Changes, a Chinese work that was old at the time of Confucius. The sanjinsoo is consulted after New Year's to obtain advice for the new year and before important undertakings, such as house-building, tomb building, marriage, bone-washing. Illness may also be a reason for consulting him but is of less importance. The method of the sanjinsoo consists of drawing one from a number of thin sticks, looking up the mark on it in his book or books, and then calculating this against a horoscope derived from the birth year of the person about whom information is requested. For the literate person he will write out a list of good months and bad months, things to be avoided and things which may bring good fortune.

Although the sanjinsoo deals with a pseudo-science, he may also admit that the gods may influence men's lives. A sanjinsoo whom I consulted as an experiment spoke at length about the importance of the gods and prayed before beginning his work, but the greater part of the time he spent looking up signs in his books, of which he had an impressive number. Some sanjinsoo are said to function also nearly in the same manner as yuta.

Sanjinsoo flourish in the larger towns and cities but are probably rare in country villages. Country people consult them on the occasions mentioned above but probably not as frequently as they consult the yuta, who are found in many, perhaps most villages.